

Creswell Half-Dugout  
Colorado-Concho Rivers Confluence Area  
South bank of Colorado River  
West of Creswell Bend  
Voss Vicinity  
Concho County  
Texas

HABS No. TX-3356

HABS  
TEX  
48-CONC.V  
3-

MEASURED DRAWINGS

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Building Survey  
National Park Service  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
CRESWELL HALF-DUGOUT

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PART I. INTRODUCTION

Location: Located 2.3 miles south-southwest of Leaday townsite, .1 miles to the west of the Creswell's Bend of the Colorado River, .6 miles southeast of Farm/Ranch Road #2134, ~~Vess~~ vicinity, CONCHO VICINITY Concho County, State of Texas

USGS Leaday Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator  
Coordinates: 14.434182, 3489333

Present Owner: Colorado River Municipal Water District

Significance: The stone-constructed Creswell half-dugout is architecturally significant as a late and unusually large example of its type and one of the last surviving examples of the dugout type once common in the region in the period of first settlement. The situation of the house, in the side of a ledge on the second of three natural stone terraces overlooking the Colorado River, is exceptionally beautiful. The site is culturally significant because of its associations with Lem Creswell, a member of the second generation of one of the first ranching families in the area and son of the builder of the stone Creswell-Rozzle house (HABS No. TX-3352), located across the river at the Creswell's Bend Ranch.

PART II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: c1906.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The site is located on lands granted to the Fisher-Miller colonization company in the 1840s, and, specifically, on the Adolph Brenner Survey of 1851.

Unless otherwise noted reference is to Deed volumes, Concho County Courthouse, Paint Rock, Texas.

- 1853 27 August 1853, D:92, Adolph Brenner to James Ferguson
- 1855 14 March 1855, D:337, German Emigration Company [Fisher-Miller Company] to James Ferguson
- 1882 15 June 1882, C:491, Emma Ferguson to J. B. Currie
- 1883 19 June 1883, E:109, J. B. Currie to McAuley & Parks
- 1889 21 January 1889, K:82, McAuley & Parks to Mrs. M. A. Creswell
- 1892 3 September 1892, N:144, A. Creswell and M. A. Creswell to L. E. [Lem] Creswell

3. Alterations and additions: The house has evolved in a series of building phases, from a small, probably one-roomed unit, into a sequence of several rooms; this evolution will be analyzed below in the appropriate discussion sections. It is relatively unaltered.

B. Historical Context:

For the general historical overview which places the property in the context of the development of cattle ranching at the confluence of the Colorado and Concho Rivers please see HABS No. TX-3350.

The Creswell Half-Dugout was built by Lem Creswell in Concho County directly across the Colorado River from the Creswell homestead, the Creswell's Bend Ranch in Coleman County. The first of the Creswell family in the confluence area was Ambrose Creswell, a native of Arkansas, who first moved into the region and camped on Elm Creek, in southern Coleman County; he was occupying this site as early as 1877, according to Coleman County tax records for that year.<sup>1</sup> In 1879 he moved his family to the site which was to be their permanent home and which would later be called Creswell's Bend. Ambrose Creswell began construction of a substantial stone house on the site (Creswell-Rozzle House, HABS No. TX- 3352) in 1880. Soon the house was part of a sizeable complex of well-constructed outbuildings and stone corrals; a large wing was added to the main house in 1893. Ambrose Creswell's relatively small cattle operation on a few hundred acres was certainly overshadowed by the operations of the great Day Ranch which engulfed him to the north

and east, and his endeavors and successes are interesting for that very reason. Ambrose and his wife, Martha E. Creswell, raised their family at the Creswell's Bend Ranch, and these children settled in the area and into a typical local pattern of life among their ranching relations. A daughter, Elizabeth Creswell, married a member of the Concho County ranching family of Gatlin. One of Elizabeth Creswell Gatlin's daughters married a member of the Rozzle family, and together they operated the Creswell's Bend Ranch until recent times. A Rozzle daughter, Bess Edmondson, a great-granddaughter of Ambrose Creswell, was among the last heirs and granted permanent easement of the Creswell's Bend Ranch to the Colorado River Municipal Water District in 1987.<sup>2</sup>

Another of Ambrose and Martha Creswell's children was their son Lemuel E. Creswell. Lem Creswell grew up at Creswell's Bend and attended school at the very early school established near the confluence of the rivers in Concho County by pioneer settlers Rich Coffey and Boh Alexander.<sup>3</sup> He married Margaret Lewis of a local ranching family; and he and his wife lived for many years at the Creswell's Bend Ranch and continued its operation. Their children were Raymond, Mary, Lewis, David, and Tom. Lem Creswell served as postmaster of the nearby town of Voss from 1 May 1908 to 1 October 1909.<sup>4</sup>

About 1906 Lem Creswell began the construction of his half-dugout across the river from Creswell's Bend.<sup>5</sup> He had received this Concho County land from his father and mother in 1892. Probably the first construction at this new site was the present central room which still retains its original configuration and its original wood-sashed windows. The house grew with a kitchen extension to the north and later a screened sleeping porch to the south; last, a small bathroom wing was added to the south to complete a long narrow file of rooms overlooking the lower bluff over the river. A barn was erected to the north on the second natural terrace.

The site and its structures remained relatively unchanged in the second half of the twentieth century. In recent times it has functioned chiefly as a camp-house for fishermen, rather than as a family farm or ranch headquarters. The property was retained in the ownership of Lem Creswell's heirs until the late 1980s.<sup>6</sup>

In 1979 the Texas Water Commission granted permission to the Colorado River Municipal Water District, an entity based in Big Spring, to construct a large dam on the Colorado River. The site chosen was a location several miles downstream from Leaday, sixteen miles below the confluence of the Colorado and Concho Rivers. Early in the planning stages, a program was developed to address environmental concerns, including the impact of the

proposed flood area on prehistoric and historic cultural resources. In 1980-1981 a survey of historic cultural resources was conducted by Freeman and Freeman under contract to Espey, Huston and Associates, a firm of Austin environmental consultants. Subsequently a number of other studies and amplifications of previous studies have been conducted. In early 1988 an Albuquerque, New Mexico, firm of environmental scientists, Mariah Associates, Inc., began further assessment of the area of the flood plain, including various archaeological investigations and assessments. Mariah has also acted in the role of coordinator of related projects, including this project: the recordation of nineteen endangered historic sites in the confluence area for the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record. The sites were selected from a list compiled under the guidance of the Texas Historical Commission.

Construction was finished on the dam in the late summer of 1989. Called the Stacy Dam and Reservoir, the project will inundate approximately 19,200 acres, and the threat of inundation of the Creswell half-dugout is possible in the near future.

### PART III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

#### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Built into the side of a naturally-terraced limestone ledge, the half-dugout faces east to a second natural terrace, and here the bluff falls sharply to the Colorado River. The narrow low stone-and-wood-constructed house is an integral part of the topography, barely visible from the upper and lower ledges. It is unusually commodious for the dug-out type, containing a series of rooms strung along the natural stone-outcropping of its terrace.
2. Condition of the fabric: The structure itself has been well-maintained and is still occupied periodically as a camp house for fishermen.

#### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The total length of the row of irregularly-spaced and shaped rooms is approximately sixty-one feet. The width, or depths, of the rooms as they are excavated into the side of the ledge to the west varies with the

shape of each room, not exceeding approximately seventeen feet.

2. Wall construction: Although constructed into the side of a limestone ledge, nevertheless, this ledge face was carefully retained by a laid-up masonry wall of limestone blocks, and the exterior walls of the outside or east face of the house were also limestone masonry, the exception being that the southernmost sleeping room has exterior cement-plastered stone walls of parapet height, only about two-and-a-half feet, with a woodframe wall above this; that is, an old framing for insect screening with recent aluminum windows inset into this section. The interior partitions are limestone masonry.
3. Porch: There is a porch of varying width inset along a section of the east front; there is a modern concrete slab for the porch floor; randomly-placed cedar posts support the roof of this section.
4. Openings: Windows and doors are modern replacements. Exceptions are the windows of the central room, which appears to be the first unit constructed; these are two old paired wood sash windows of the four-over-four pane pattern.
5. Roof: A very shallow-pitched gable roof covers the long narrow row of rooms; it is intersected to the west by a shallow cross-gable over the old central room. The roof covering is metal, both standing-seam and corrugated sheets. The roof of the little south bathroom addition is a flat reinforced concrete slab.

#### C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: A central room, approximately fifteen feet wide and seventeen feet in length, presently functioning as a bedroom, was probably the first phase of construction; it retains two old sash windows which are probably original. To the north of this room is a small kitchen, approximately nine feet by ten feet. South of the central room is another bedroom, an obviously later addition constructed as a sleeping porch with, originally, its entire east face consisting of a stone parapet with insect screening above to the ceiling; it is approximately sixteen feet wide and twenty-one feet long. The last phase of the building was the construction of a bathroom, approximately seven feet wide and twelve feet long, added to the south side of the sleeping porch and completing the sequence of rooms.

2. Flooring: Flooring varies throughout the house: there are concrete slabs for the floors of the old central room, the kitchen, and the bathroom; stone slabs for the sleeping room appear to be laid in recent times.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The house is set into the side of a natural limestone ledge high above the Colorado River and facing a flat natural stone terrace; this terrace falls to another natural terrace thickly grown with large cottonwood and pecan trees, then drops sharply down a bluff to the river. The approach road is from the west and continues along the upper ledge parallel and above the roof of the house, then down to the north toward the two natural terraces and a barn.
2. Outbuilding: About two hundred feet northeast of the house, situated on the second natural terrace below the house terrace, is a small barn, approximately twelve feet wide and fourteen feet in length, set on a rough stone footing. It gives the appearance of unusually carefully crafted log construction, built of large members with excellent notched joints. On close examination these large dressed timber members appear to be reused--there is evidence of bored holes in the lengths and other joinery markings--from some earlier structure. Vertical wood sheathing remains in place on some of the surfaces of the building. The gabled room is covered in corrugated metal sheets. There is a roughly constructed hinged door in the west face and an upper opening in the east end facing the river.
3. Enclosures: Remains of low stone walls are in place about twenty feet to the north of the structure, designed as a small enclosure wall. This wall continues down the east side of the structure for its entire length at a distance of approximately ten feet from the house itself.

Prepared by:  
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PART IV. ENDNOTES

1. For a fuller discussion of the Creswell's Bend Ranch and the Creswell family and various sources of information, see HABS No. TX-3352.

2. Reference is to Coleman County Courthouse, District Clerk's Office; an unrecorded judgement on condemnation proceedings granting permanent easement, 26 May 1987.

3. Ralph Terry, "Leaday Schools," published in Coleman County Historical Commission, A History of Coleman County and Its People, vol. 1., (San Angelo, Texas: Anchor Publishing Company, 1985), 152.

4. Doris Williams, "Coleman County Post Offices," published in Coleman County Historical Commission, vol. 1., 37.

5. Martha Doty Freeman and Joe C. Freeman, A Cultural Resource Inventory of the Proposed Stacy Reservoir, Concho, Coleman and Runnels Counties, Texas, vol. II: Historical Cultural Resources, report prepared for the Colorado River Municipal Water District by Espey, Huston and Associates, Inc., Engineering and Environmental Consultants (Austin, Texas, March 1981), 7-4.

6. The exact date is not clear, as the grants of permanent easement on several Concho County sites had not been filed on record by late August 1989.



PART V. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored by Mariah Associates, Inc., archaeologists; recorded under the direction of Greg Kendrick, HABS regional coordinator, Denver. The Project was completed during the summer and fall of 1989 at the project field office at Houston and College Station, Texas. Project supervisor was Graham B. Luhn, A.I.A., architect; project architectural historian was Gus Hamblett, Texas A&M University; intern architects were Debbie Fernandez and Paul Neidinger; student architects were Brian Dougan, Robert Holton, Janna Johnson, Wayne Jones, and Pat Sparks, Texas A&M University; project photographer was Paul Neidinger, photographic processing by Laura McFarlane.